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DEPARTMENT FOR H (JBULGRIN), DRL (GMAGGIO)

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SUBJECT: HONDURAN HUMAN RIGHTS GAINS ABETTED-BY STRONG
CIVIL SOCIETY BUT CHALLENGES REMAIN

¶1. Over 20 non-governmental organizations (NGO) met with the Ambassador on October 28 to discuss the challenges and opportunities they currently face in Honduras. The meeting offered a chance for the most well known organizations that deal with issues related to Human Rights to meet the new Ambassador as well as the new Human Rights Officer (PolOff). The meeting gathered together a number of organizations working against domestic violence and trafficking, plus those groups that promote children's rights, freedom of the press, and environmental rights, amongst other causes. The Ambassador opened up the conversation by acknowledging the advances Central America has made in regards to human rights as well as commending the organizations for their dedication and hard work.

¶2. The open discussion focused on the process of selecting new Supreme Court Magistrates, impunity within the justice system, land rights issues, violence against women and children, and the violence and threats of violence against members of human rights organizations and the legal community. Each organization was given the opportunity to speak individually in the informal setting. It was agreed by all that there needed to be more coordination between the organizations. In addition, the groups praised the work of Embassy and the State Department Human Rights Report, which they reported is of great value to their work.

¶3. Ambassador and PolOff also met with Dr. Ramon Custodio, Director of the National Commission for Human Rights (known as CONADEH in Spanish) on October 30. Ambassador expressed the importance the Embassy places on human rights.

¶4. The Ambassador reiterated the importance of freedom of association for all groups, especially those who support alternative lifestyles (i.e. homosexual, lesbian, transsexual, etc.), which have had difficulties with Honduran authorities in the past. Both agreed that while these groups often clash with the Catholic church, they do important work such as HIV/AIDS prevention and promotion. Ambassador and Custodio shared the opinion that there is more freedom in Honduras than in the past and that civil society is stronger, but that the challenges to ensure these freedoms and rights have also grown.

¶5. In regards to the primary elections, Custodio stated that the President had no authority to change the date of the elections, but also added that he believed there was no truth to the conspiracy theories of the President wanting to remain in power beyond his mandate. Custodio went on to state that the main challenges for human rights in Honduras are political rights, health and education rights.

¶6. Comment: The groups greatly appreciated the opportunity to express their points of view and be heard. They told us that they have a difficult time being heard and getting

access to the media. The Embassy will continue to engage all of these interlocutors on their individual issues, and also try to assist with publicizing them. We will also work to encourage these disparate groups to work together so that they can advocate as a block in support of basic human rights issues. End Comment.
LLORENS